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Host communities' perception of oil companies' corporate social responsibility for managing conflict in Nigeria's Niger Delta

*Samuel Okere, Ph.D., & **Ogbiten Brickins Ogbemi

Abstract
This paper examined what host communities of oil companies operating in the Niger Delta think about the corporate social responsibility programmes of the oil companies as conflict management measures. The study sought to provide answers to the following research questions: what is the knowledge of the host communities about CSR programmes which the oil companies are executing in the Niger Delta for managing conflicts in their host communities?; to what extent are the host communities satisfied with the CSR programmes of the oil companies in resolving conflicts in the Niger Delta?; and what do the host communities consider as impediments to effective implementation of CSR programmes by the oil companies as conflict management tools. The study was guided by the social conflict theory. Data were generated through direct in-depth interviews with four respondents representing four communities, two in Delta State and two in Rivers State. The qualitative mode was adopted for analysis and discussion. Findings show that host communities have a high level of knowledge of CSR programmes of the oil companies, but the host communities are dissatisfied with the oil companies because of continued environmental degradation and increasing rate of poverty in the host communities.

Key Words: Conflict Management; Conflict Resolution; Corporate Social Responsibility; Host Communities; Oil Companies

Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a strategy for managing conflict between oil companies and their host communities in the Niger Delta is gaining acceptability among all stakeholders. With CSR in place, it is envisioned that host communities would perceive the oil companies as corporate citizens. This, it is hoped would create mutual and cordial existence between the oil companies and their host communities. Asak, (2008) and Ochonogor and Njoku (2006) are of the view that well planned corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies will encourage the Niger Delta indigenes to adequately participate in their own affairs through dialogue, in the formulation or planning process and implementation of policies that affect them. In the long run, conflicts between the oil companies and their host communities would be minimised. This is because, there is a relationship between corporate social relationship and crisis management.

In realisation of this, the oil companies are making various efforts to pacify their host communities through different forms of community-based projects which ostensibly fit into corporate social responsibility (CSR). Notwithstanding, the conflicts continue to exist. This then raises a major concern of how CSR can function as an effective strategy in managing the conflicts between oil companies and their host communities. In light of this, the view of Idemudia (2010) that the problem with CSR projects in the Niger Delta is that the people are only remembered by the oil companies when there is a major project to be carried out is worth considering. He maintains that the oil companies

*   Samuel Okere, Ph.D., is a lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria.
** Ogbiten Brickins Ogbemi is of the Department of Mass Communication, Babcock University, Ilishan Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria.

only try to placate the communities so that they can have an easy access to their oil exploitation business. Frynas (2005) supports this view and points out that most multinational oil producing companies carry out CSR for selfish reasons just to maintain a stable and conflict free working environment. His inference is that CSR projects are not necessarily carried out in the area as obligations of the oil producing companies but just to calm the people. In other words, CSR is just a measure of managing conflict in the region. From the foregoing, there is every need to probe into the perspective of the host communities regarding what they think about the CSR projects which the oil companies are introducing as strategy for managing conflict.

In recent times, host communities to oil companies in the Niger Delta have consistently maintained a disposition of animosity towards the oil companies. The situation has degenerated to violent protests against the oil companies, kidnapping, and blockade of oil facilities and disruption of business activities. In the midst of this tensed situation, the oil companies have maintained a bold stand that they have been carrying out projects that are benefitting the host communities so as to reduce these conflicts between them and the host communities. Yet, the host communities have continued to express their displeasure against the claims of the oil companies accusing them of being insensitive to their plights. In view of this, this paper sets out to evaluatethe host communities' perception of the oil companies' corporate social responsibility projects which the oil companies claim are for managing conflicts between them and their host communities.

The objectives of this study are to:

1. evaluate the knowledge of host communities about CSR programmes executed by oil companies in the Niger Delta in managing conflict in their host communities.
2. ascertain the extent to which the host communities are satisfied with the CSR programmes of the oil companies in resolving conflicts in the Niger Delta;
3. identify the impediments to effective implementation of CSR programmes by the oil companies as conflict management tools in host communities in the Niger Delta.

This paper is guided by the social conflict theory. Karl Marx (1818 – 1883) is considered as one of the strongest proponents of this theory. The theoretical approach to social conflicts, according to Isika (2012) from the Marxist-based social conflict paradigm is "launched on the argument that individuals, groups and social classes have differing amounts of natural resources and that the powerful groups use their power to exploit those with less power" (p. 158). The argument is that "from brute force and economics, society is created from on-going class conflicts (p. 58).Conflict is indeed, an inevitable element of human existence. As long as people live together, there must be one form of conflict or the other. To this end therefore, conflict has become an on-going and regular phenomenon in human existence. It is unwittingly in most cases the determinant factor and what limits the conditions for human existence.

The conflicts between oil producing communities and oil producing companies can be described as a conflict of interest due scarcity. The primary interest of the oil companies is to make profit, while the oil producing communities feel cheated and want to perfect their interest of being well compensated for the natural resources in their area. This is usually the primary cause in these conflicts. Although such conflicts have led to destruction of oil facilities, kidnapping and in some cases loss of lives, they cannot be necessarily described as such aggressive conflict behaviour, most blatantly expressed in religious and ideological warfare.

The proponents of conflict theory are of the view that a social society is exposed to constant erosion and change. In other words, social change is constant as a result of the fundamental nature of conflict embedded in society itself. Conflict is therefore unavoidable between individuals and groups. As the Niger Delta is made up of individuals and groups, specifically oil bearing communities and oil producing companies, conflict is inevitable. The main problem is traceableto the oil resources. Whereas, the oil companies desire to maximise profit, the host communities are interested in protecting their environment and their source of livelihood. The result is conflicts from various dimensions and these have to be resolved and managed.

Marx's social conflict theory is relevant here in the sense that the host communities see the oil companies as agents of oppression, exploitation, domination, coercion and underdevelopment, especially in the area of sustainable development goals that affect the people. From the foregoing, the social conflict theory identifies the roots of conflict and its existence in society due to man's natural inequality, thereby not clearly providing the dimensions of conflicts between host communities and oil companies and how local people could express their grievances when situated. It points to the fact that conflict is inherent in individuals and groups. More so, that the whole idea of CSR projects of the Oil companies in the Niger Delta is to placate the host communities so as to create a cordial and conducive atmosphere for operations of the oil producing companies. Frustration wherever it exists, gradually leads to aggression which is a component of conflict. To this extent therefore, this theory is considered very appropriate to this paper.

Review of Literature

Corporate social responsibility is a philosophical understanding that both the environment and human beings are great contributors to the growth of any business. Therefore, business organisations operating within a certain physical environment need to make tangible commitments towards replenishing that environment.Corporate social responsibilityis the business philosophy taken by corporations to provide basic infrastructures and amenities to alleviate the suffering of the communities where they operate. It involves giving back part of what they make from the community for the development of the place. The purpose is to create, maintain and sustain cordial relationship in their host communities and to present themselves as good corporate citizens. It is the deliberate efforts of oil producing companies to provide infrastructures, projects and services to their host communities in order to avoid conflicts, as it is related to this study.

In the same vein, the human beings within that environment should enjoy an enhanced quality of life which should be provided by that business organization. This implies that business organizations should consider the interest of both human beings and the physical environment while considering material gain and profit. This calls for justice and equity in the exploitation of natural resources (Ako, Obokoh, &Okonmah, 2009).

For Amao (2008), CSR epitomizes justice and equity as both the environment and humanity stand to gain from the exploitation of natural resources. In general terms, CSR seeks to make business organizations look beyond profit, and to seek the overall good of humanity. It seeks to make business organizations appreciate the inter-relationship between profit and sustainability through initiating projects that will impact on both humanity and the environment, especially, the immediate environment where such organisations operate. CSR addresses the issue of doing business with a human face. When appropriately applied, it brings a lot of gains for all the stakeholders whether from within the business organization or from within the environment of the business organization. It is in this regard that UNIDO (2007) considers a sure means of guaranteeing the hopes and aspirations of every stakeholder. This of course includes investors, the workforce and embers of the communities where such investments are made.

Corporations and business enterprises all over the world have come to realize the importance of creating, maintaining and sustaining cordial and peaceful relationship between them and the various communities where they operate and are now facing the realities that they must contribute meaningfully to the societies and environment where they do business. Gone are the days when the essence of business is just making profits for investors and shareholders. Businesses now have to plough back part of their profits to develop their host communities if they have to operate without disturbances and conflicts. According to D'Amato, Henderson and Florence, (2009), grappling with this new role to "meet the aspirations of the present generations without compromising the ability of the next generations to meet their own needs" (p. 129) is an emerging role that companies, especially oil producing companies must contend with. Although not legally bound by law, organisations are now forced to take serious responsibilities for the effect of their operations on society. They are therefore, consequently to act responsibly as good corporate citizens by taking into consideration the interest and aspirations of the individuals and

groups in their areas of operation. The focus now for corporations is giving back part of what they exploit to the areas where they are doing business. This is the whole argument for corporate social responsibility (CSR).

In recognition of the many years of neglect and worrisome deplorable conditions of the people, as parts of her CSR, International Oil Companies have tried many models of community development programmes in the region. Starting from 1956 when oil was discovered in Oloibiri in the present Bayelsa State by the then Dutch Shell petroleum, different models have been tried and abandoned. Some of the models of community development programmes attempted in the region includeCommunity Assistance (CA), Community Development (CD), Sustainable Community Development (SCD) and until recently, al Memorandum of Understanding (GMoU).

Community Assistance (CA) is one of the earliest models put forward by SPDC and other International Oil Companies in an attempt to give back to society some of its gains from crude oil proceeds. This policy of Shell was invoked in the 1960s and it was conducted without consultation with community members (Idemudia, 2009). Whatever was deemed fit by the company was given to the natives in form of gifts. This philanthropic approach came with many setbacks. For instance, educational infrastructures were not properly developed in a way that it would sustain the total development of the host communities. considered them not to be their priority at the time. Idemudia (2007) described this corporate social responsibility model as pay-as-you-go. However, in the 1990s, the many complaints from the host communities and a series of crises which strained the relationship between the oil companies and their host communities brought about the intervention of the international community which forced the oil companies to change from Community assistance to Community Development (CD).

Community Development (CD)involves a bottom-top approach where welfare packages were put in place to ensure community development. This model empowered the people and boosted their social welfare indices; healthcare services were also expected to be provided for using internationally acceptable practices. However, one pitfall of the CD model

was that it rather increased the expectations of the host communities which the oil companies did not manage properly (Idemudia, 2007). In addition, the community did not have total ownership of the process and the challenge of sustainability loomed in the horizon hence in 2003, the transition to Sustainable Community Development (SCD).

Sustainable Community Development (SCD)entailed the involvement of all stakeholders in the delivery of community development projects (Obugo, 2015). However, Ite (2007) observed that limited involvement of all the communities became a source of conflict in the region. It was because of this lapse that the global memorandum of understanding model was introduced.

Global Memorandum of Understanding (GMoU)is a documented statement in form of an agreement between an oil company and clusters of communities on the role of each stakeholder in the identification, funding and implementation of community development projects. Okoro (2014) notes that it is a holistic and participatory process meant to address socio-economic development challenges. The principal precept of the model is collective involvement of group communities. With this model, administration of projects is expected to be wholly in the hands of community members. It merits lies in the fact that it encourages symbiotic relationship between the host communities and the oil companies. It makes room for the cultivation of transparency and accountability accountability which in turn reduces ill-feelings and conflicts in the region as it offers synergy among the stakeholders.

Otite (2001), asserts that conflict starts when persons or a group of persons in a particular environment pursue different desires, interests, objectives, goals and aspirations. The development of a change in the environment of any society such as the discovery of new natural resources usually raises a fertile environment for conflict. Conflicts manifest themselves in different ways depending on the circumstance. Some may involve groups struggle over resources, while others are busy struggling for power and other economic benefits, either for self-actualisation, selfishness or to meet their unlimited desire for basic human needs. Conflicts can also be caused by the continuous drama of political power domination and economic

oppression, particularly those that involve minority and majority ethnic nationalities. Conflict can occur when two or more people/groups fight over some matter of interest. One issue that must be pointed out is that the way parties to any conflict see it has the potential of either escalating or reducing it.

The development of conflict in any society makes it important for stakeholders to take conflict management as a necessity. By engaging in conflict management, stakeholders take steps towards enforcing a mechanism and strategic responses aimed at achieving goals of conflict resolution as an important part of the agenda of mutual and peaceful coexistence. Such a move could involve negotiations, confidence building and conflict-sensitive programmes at different levels. The management strategies adopted so far have been based on how each of the three stakeholders in the Niger Delta saga, that is the communities, the oil companies and the federal or state government, perceive the problems of the Niger Delta and the methods for dealing with them. At first, the host communities had come to the conclusion that their destinies were in their own hands and as such they would have to constantly employ strategies that are inherently negative and hostile towards the oil companies (Onosode, 2003). Manifestations of this stance can be found in the various demands for resource control and in some extreme cases, agitation for self determination and cessation.

According to Ogbemi (2014) organisations respond in different ways to the environment. This depends on whether the organization is passive or active, reactive or proactive. Responding to the environment instead of remaining passive is very important because an organization can make adjustments when faced with an unfavourable environmental condition that possess threats to its very existence. Crisis management is very important in public relations, but it is better to avoid crisis situations by engaging in issues management. Engaging in CSR is a vital way in which organisations avoid conflict. Other conflict resolution strategies will be discussed below;

According to Miller (2005) the alternative dispute resolution (ADR) method deals with conflict in such a way that the result would be generally agreeable to the parties in disputes. The truth is that "it takes two parties which are willing to actualize a win-win outcome for a conflict to be successfully resolved" (Onyima & Iwuoha, 2015 p. 50). Two ways through which conflict can be resolved are either through confrontation or arbitration. Confrontation involves the direct expressing of a party or person's idea, thoughts or feelings as it affects the conflict situation. It could involve the bringing together of those involved in the conflict together and giving them the opportunity to state their cases. This will involve exploring and clarifying issues about the conflict but could be aggressive. Physical and emotions/attack or verbal exchanging can come in (Etekpe, 2012; Miller, 2005; Okolie-Osemene, & Okanume (2012). This method is what the federal government initially employed in solving the Niger Delta conflict by deploying troops to the area to protect oil installations and workers but yielded little or no results. Confrontation has always failed in resolving conflicts. At the end, this conflicting parties are forced to come together to resolve issues amicably. This is the only way to find long lashing solutions to conflicts.

Another form of alternative dispute resolution strategy is third-party intervention. Usually involves a third-party intervention. Arbitrators are appointed either by the disputants or an impartial interested party who genuinely want the dispute resolved. The third party or arbitrator takes evidences from the parties and address the source of the conflict and comes out with a solution or settlement plan that is acceptable to the parties involved in the dispute or conflict. According to Okolie-Osemene and Tor (2012) third party decision making methods occur when the intervening parties acting on behalf of the greater society such as a properly constituted court of law pronounces mandatory judgment to settle the conflict. When it involves an arbitration tribunal or court, the award or judgment is usually binding on all parties involved. Most organisations particularly the oil producing multinationals in the Niger Delta region have come up with ways of handling conflicts. Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), according to Ogbemi, (2014) has its procedure of handling community disturbances and this involves; "discussing the community's demands and problems, using local and government arbitrators, pursuing amiable settlement of the

dispute shutting down if peaceful operation is not possible, follow-up and discussions and restarting operations only with the community's consent" (pp. 78-79). Of course, the handling of press relations is left to the experts in the public relations department.

The second strand is based on the 'paradigm shift' to the new understanding that the essential link between peace in the Niger Delta, the oil companies and the Nigerian economy is community development projects. Such projects have included the provision of social and economic infrastructure, compensation for polluted land, a youth's skill acquisition programme and scholarships for students of Niger Delta origin. It is for this purpose that this paper is seeking to find out how the host communities perceive all these social responsibility efforts of the oil companies vis-à-vis finding solution to conflicts between the oil companies and the host communities.

Method of Study
This study used face-to-face in-depth interview. The data collected were presented and analysed qualitatively. . This qualitative approach gave the study the advantage of an interpretative study that enables individual observers to "create reality as part of the research process" (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 15). The interviews were conducted on four respondents drawn from four oil producing communities in Delta and Rivers States. Each of the states had two respondents. These respondents are representatives of the four communities enlisted for this study. The narrative mode was utilized to harmonise the responses along the line of the three research questions that guided the study

Presentation of Responses
Representative of Koko community in Warri North Local Government Area of Delta State
The companies he said have performed below average in terms of the provision of corporate social responsibility programmes. Total Nigeria Plc which is the major oil company operating in the area has only succeeded in providing few employment opportunities for community members. They have, however, tried in the area of training community members in the area of skills acquisition and they also provide "starter

packs" for trainees who complete the programme to start up their own business. Unfortunately, some of such beneficiaries abscond and do not go on with the business. This has been a major area of concern for the community.

On the attitude of the host community to CSR programmes, the representative said that CSR programmes are welcome but Total Oil Company has not done much and this has brought dissatisfactory and negative attitude to CSR. There is therefore, lack of trust as most promises were not kept, For instance, of all the company staff, only one community member is a senior staff and in the whole of Total Nigeria, there are not up to three members of the community that are senior staff. Unfortunately, most of the indigenes that are employees are under the employment of contractors, not the main oil company. The community has been consulting and meeting with the company representatives but what they are offering is nothing to write home about.

Representative of Edhomoko-Okpesia, Isoko North Local Government Area of Delta State
Some of the factors militating against the implementation of CSR programmes, according to him, are the insincerity of some community leaders who appropriate funds for the execution of projects in the community for their personal use. Another area is the collaboration of some officials of the oil firms by settling the corrupt community leaders heavily to short-change the community and deprive it of what is due to it. Others include dishonesty by some members of the community development union executives which often leads to crisis in the community making it impossible for the oil firms to operate in the area. Shell introduced direct payments to contractors for projects executed in the community to resolve this conflict. He also identified dubious dealings by some powerful community leaders and some royal fathers with the oil firms for personal aggrandizement to short-change the community as some of the factors that cause crisis.

Representative of an Oil Producing Area in Rivers State (Adiai Kingdom-Ndoni South)
According to this respondent, the main oil company operating in the community is Nigeria Agip Oil Company (NAOC) and they are

operating field: OB-OB which is quite large. He accused the oil company of making a lot of money from the area for many years without the people who bear the brunt of the oil production being adequately compensated. He said that the attitude of his people to CSR as conflict management tool is totally negative. NAOC, he said has been very dishonest and not forthcoming when it comes to the issue of the provision of CSR programmes for the people.

Asked to list the specific CSR programmes the company has provided for the people, he said there is nothing to list as the company is taking the people's magnanimity as stupidity. He said that the people are being mobilized for a major shut down with the oil company early next year. He added that CSR interventions have not affected the attitude of members of the communities in the kingdom because there are no significant CSR interventions in the communities. Their attitude will always remain negative as long as, AGIP continue to take advantage of the peaceful nature of the people to exploit them and this situation will not certainly remain for long. The oil company does not believe in consultation and their operation style is giving out "handouts".

He concluded that the problem militating against the implementation of CSR programme as a conflict management tool by the oil company is the management of AGIP who only believe in their profit motive to the detriment of the well-being of the communities. He then advised AGIP to honour signed MOUs or be ready to face the wrath of the community. Their relationship with the company will never be cordial as long as they continue to exploit the community where they operate.

Representative of Obor Community in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State
He said that the nature of the CSR programmes carried out by AGIP has positively affected the attitude of the members of the community towards conflict management. According to him, human wants are insatiable; however, "I will say that my community to a great extent is satisfied with the CSR programmes of AGIP". On consultation, he said that good leadership, understanding among the organs of governing bodies in the community, good policies on the side of AGIP and memoranda

of understanding (MOU) put in place before any CSR programme is executed have helped a lot in promoting good relationship between the company and the host communities.

On the factors militating against the implementation of CSR programmes by oil companies, the representative said that they include insecurity in the whole Niger Delta region, insincerity by some community leaders and bad company policies. He suggested that emphasis should be laid on the damages the operations of the companies have caused in the operational areas.

From the foregoing views of the respondents, certain deductions could be made. Paramount among these is that the issue of corporate social responsibility in the Niger Delta area has now become a major concern between business organisations especially international and indigenous oil producing companies and their host communities. Before now, companies regard their being existence in business to make profit and pay taxes to the government while government develop the communities in which they operate. However things are revolving because of the lack of immediate response of the government to sanitize and develop the Niger Delta area which is the major source of revenue to the government.

Accordingly they regarded budgets on social responsibilities as unnecessary cost and a reduction of profit. However, current global attitude towards environmental pollution and the need for reconstruction and compensation had gradually made business organizations including oil companies make budgets for developments. It is in light of this that the first objective of this study is being addressed. It is asking about the knowledge of CSR intervention measures of the oil companies that the host communities have. There is no doubt that the host communities are aware that the oil companies are introducing CSR programmes within their areas of operation. In other words, the host communities have reasonable knowledge of the CSR programmes that are put in place by the oil companies.

Regarding the second objective which seeks to find out how satisfied the host communities are with the CSR programmes of the oil companies, it is obvious that there is a general atmosphere of dissatisfaction. Despite the respective programmes introduced to correct the decades of

neglects in corporate social responsibility in the Niger Delta region, the expectations from the host community is still very high. This is one fundamental precursor to conflict in the Niger Delta to this day. The community members expect the oil companies and indigenous business organisations to involve them in the management of the revenues derived from their land. The management of these resources according to the host communities should revolve around four themes. These are development, economic empowerment, effective participation and transparency.

The third and last objective seeks to find out what the host communities consider as impediments toeffective implementation of CSR programmes by the oil companies as conflict management tools in host communities in the Niger Delta. The host communities are of the view that the oil companies do not have CSR as a fundamental point of relationship with them. These programmes are only introduced when conflicts arise. They are also carried out in such a way that creates more tension within the communities. This is because of lack transparency in the dealings of the oil companies.

Conclusion

Conflict is an inherent fact of life and relationship. It is inevitable in any relationship. This is more so, where there is an exploitative relationship at the expense of the host communities as is being demonstrated by the oil companies operating in the Niger Delta. Therefore, what is required is an excellent practice of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) by the oil producing companies in the Niger Delta. It should be in line with the consistent and resolute call for it by the host communities and best practices in other parts of the world to ensure very smooth and disruption-free operation of oil production activities in the Niger Delta. The oil producing companies in the Niger Delta, like in other parts of the world, have the capability to discover, invent, create, advance, and transform the oil producing areas. With effective CSR practice, the accumulated wealth generated by oil exploration and production in the Niger Delta can bring to all persons in the area benefits of a safe environment, development and the opportunity to enhance the quality of life. It is only in such peaceful environment that production of oil can be maximized in Nigeria.

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